

**Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary
Large Vessel Working Group**

**Key West Old City Hall
October 24, 2002**

In Attendance

Bob Smith – Facilitator, Florida Keys Community College, Key West
Capt. Don Kincaid – Co-Chair, Sanctuary Advisory Council, Stars & Stripes
Nancy Klingener – Co-Chair, SAC and The Ocean Conservancy
Fritz Wettstein – Co-Chair, FKNMS Lower Region Manager
Billy Causey – FKNMS Superintendent
Capt. Jim Watson – Commanding Officer, U.S. Coast Guard, Miami
John Dolan-Heitlinger – Key West Chamber of Commerce
Chuck Fitzsimmons – Key West Bar Pilots
Sandy Walters – Key West Bar Pilots
Bob Spicer – Carnival Cruise Lines
Peter Cone – Commercial Diver
Raymond Archer – Port Director, City of Key West
Gus Rios – Florida Dept. of Environmental Protection Administrator, Marathon
Dan Probert – Chairman, Key West Port Advisory Council
Ron Demes – Business Manager, Key West Naval Air Station
Capt. Kenny Harris – Charter Boat Captain
Richard Wells – Caribe Nautical
Capt. Joe Nimmich – Commander, U.S. Coast Guard, Key West
Capt. Robert Trosset – Fishing Boat Captain
Michael Bailey – Coordinator, Recreational Fishing, NMFS
Dr. Bill Kruczynski – Program Scientist, EPA Region IV
Jacob Cohen – Student, FKCC
Capt. Bjorn Johansen – Safety Assurance Manager, Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines
Steve Collins – Regulatory Compliance Specialist, RCCL
George Garrett – Marine Resources Director, Monroe County
Erwin Wunderlich – Environmental Engineer, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Alan Miller – Public
Dr. Margaret Miller – Research Scientist, NMFS
Fiona Wilmot, Meeting Recorder, FKNMS, Water Quality Protection Program

I. Welcome and Introductions – Fritz Wettstein, Co-Chair

Fritz Wettstein introduced himself, co-chairs Don Kincaid and Nancy Klingener, and welcomed all participants on the Working Group. He said that the group is intended to be a balanced representation of all stakeholders, with an approximately 18 month time-frame in which to develop recommendations to make to the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council (SAC) concerning large vessel operations in Key West Harbor. Meetings are to be professionally facilitated. All participants then introduced themselves, giving brief biographies, concluding with the facilitator, Bob Smith, Director of the dive program at the Florida Keys Community College.

II. Charge of the Working Group – Billy Causey, FKNMS Superintendent

Billy Causey explained the role played by the Advisory Council in the development of the Management Plan for the Sanctuary, which was designated by an act of Congress in 1990. He said that the 19-member Advisory Council represents a very diverse constituency and operates on a consensus basis to make recommendations on difficult issues, regarding Sanctuary resources, to the Sanctuary management co-partners at Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). He observed that large vessel operations in Key West Harbor have become a matter of considerable local interest from a variety of perspectives and are a priority issue for the SAC to consider, hence the formation of the Working Group, which is open to non-Council members. He stressed that the charge of the Working Group is to deal with natural resource issues with a view to decades-long protection and that social issues are the responsibility of local governments. It is not intended to stop cruise ship activity or the Navy presence in Key West Harbor. Mr. Causey expressed the hope that the group will identify the issues, such as sedimentation and water quality, and then the tools necessary to address them. Comments followed concerning the stabilizing effect of the cruise ship industry on the economy of Key West, and the desirability of considering the health of the harbor as a whole.

III. Ground Rules – Bob Smith, Facilitator

Bob Smith established that the Working Group has the goal of producing recommendations to the Advisory Council for mitigating the impacts of large ship traffic on the marine environment and determining whether there is a basis for some perceived impacts. He said that the process would involve every member of the group voicing particular concerns and the whole group identifying actions for mitigating those concerns. Billy Causey noted that there exists another body under Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) authority, the Water Quality Protection Program Steering Committee, to which recommendations can also be made. After some discussion, Bob Smith emphasized the importance of the group staying focused on the subject of large vessel impacts on the marine environment, and the employment of reason and not emotion in presenting issues. He invited the group individually to answer the questions: “What concerns and interests do you think need to be addressed by the group”; and, “What actions need to be considered?” It was clarified that the Sanctuary definition of a large

ship is a vessel of 50 meters or greater. Comments followed concerning the importance of representation of the community as a whole, and the importance of respecting diversity of opinion in the decision-making process, as well as the openness of the Working Group to additional members.

IV. Issue Identification – Working Group Members

Captain Jim Watson representing the Coast Guard identified four agency concerns:

- Ship board regulatory and enforcement requirements, ranging from material requirements to equipment requirements
- Navigation, from aids to navigation to regulations for mariners
- Security
- Qualifications of all personnel involved: mariners, port authorities, agencies.

John Dolan-Heitlinger identified two concerns:

- Quality of life effects, how the environment impacts the economy
- The output of the group be based on good, understandable, science and measurements.

Chuck Fitzsimmons identified the continued presence and stability of the large vessel industry in Key West as a primary concern of the Harbor Pilots who are specifically trained to operate in Key West Harbor, as well as turbidity.

Sandy Walters entered a copy of “Summary of Research on Impacts of Ships and Turbidity in Key West Harbor”, Sandra Walters Consultants (1999), prepared for the Harbor Pilots, into the record. She expressed the concern that the results are ultimately based on good science and scientific opinion and that additional experts on coastal dynamics be brought into the deliberations. Billy Causey said that panels of experts from different fields will present to the Working Group and the public in general at a later date.

Bob Spicer said that Carnival Cruise Line is concerned about negative perceptions of the cruise industry, despite efforts to minimize impacts.

Peter Cone identified turbidity and sedimentation impacts on corals in Hawks Channel, particularly when ships leave harbor on an outgoing tide, as major areas of concern.

Ray Archer expressed the desire that the results from the group be based on facts and not on perceived assumptions, and noted that although the emphasis is on the marine environment, the outside world has wider expectations.

Gus Rios said that from a regulatory viewpoint he has concerns about water quality in South Florida as well as resources within Florida waters, issues that he would like to be addressed with good science. He mentioned that although the cruise ship industry has signed an agreement with the State of Florida concerning Best Management Practices, the actual regulatory authority for cruise ships is the Coast Guard and he expressed the hope that the Working Group will establish regulatory jurisdictions.

Captain Ken Harris said his primary concern is turbidity although ballast water, invasive exotics and gray water, as well as the appropriate body to conduct investigations, are also major concerns.

Dan Probert noted that the Port Advisory Board probably has the strongest interest in determining what are real and what are perceived issues, and resolving them with a concern for the whole port, and not selected categories of vessel.

Ron Demes clarified that the mission at the Naval Air Facility in Key West is to enable the war fighter, a role subject to changing mission requirements as the Navy modernizes and responds to world events. He stressed the commitment on the part of the Navy over the years to minimize environmental impacts through major projects, such as the proposed silt removal from the harbor, which has not been carried out since 1965.

George Garrett concurred with Gus Rios that water quality and resource issues are paramount in Monroe County . He expressed concern over dealing with a mixed population of vessels in the harbor as traffic increases.

Richard Wells expressed concern that there is a substantial body of disinformation concerning large vessel operations in the public domain. He hopes this will be clarified by the Working Group.

Captain Robert Trosset expressed the view that the solutions to the turbidity problem which he has observed increasingly to the west, lie in either dredging the harbor, or else anchoring large ships offshore and ferrying people in.

Erwin Wunderlich indicated that the Army Corps has two main areas of interest: restoring and stabilizing degraded habitat and supporting navigation through capitalized projects.

Dr. Margaret Miller said that as a NOAA fisheries scientist, she is on the Working Group to provide scientific expertise on distinguishing between real and perceived impacts and reiterated the need for bringing additional coastal zone expertise to the group.

Captain Joe Nimmich noted that two aspects of Coast Guard operations are represented, preventive and operational and that he represents the latter. He itemized his three major concerns:

- Harbor congestion, with both safe navigation and security being important issues
- Navigational complexity
- A catastrophic mitigation plan in the event of a disaster impacting reef resources.

Michael Bailey, also of NOAA fisheries, said that as a manager, he is concerned with regulations that may adversely impact marine recreational anglers and is also concerned with oversight of the revision of the National Artificial Reef Plan.

Dr. Bill Kruczynski, representing EPA, said that his major concern is the effect of chronic turbidity on water quality and the marine biota, which is currently in need of good science to determine if there is a problem, the nature and severity of the problem, and how to amend it, before taking the issue to the public. He noted that other bodies of water in the Keys are also affected by turbidity problems, usually caused by boats too large for the depth. He expressed the further concern that dredging the harbor, a cumulative body, to a deeper depth may encourage the introduction of still larger vessels than those proposed.

Bjorn Johansen said that his concern is with the physical size of the harbor and safe navigation of the approach channel. If the approach channel were wider, cruise ships would be able to make a slower approach and cause less turbidity.

Steve Collins, representing International Companies of Cruise Lines concurred with earlier views on the need for good, objective science and added that the industry is concerned that recommended operational or mechanical changes on cruise ships are implementable.

Don Kincaid as co-chair indicated that sedimentation is a high priority. He also expressed concern about possible transport of human coliform bacteria in the sediment plume from the harbor out to the reef. Scientific expertise is complementary to local experience in this process.

Nancy Klingener, on behalf of the SAC, thanked all in attendance for participating, and in addition as TOC manager said that water quality is the first issue, whether it be pollution and discharges, ballast water or gray water. She said that the economics of the issue can be explored using Key West Chamber of Commerce data and that the long term aspects of any recommendations should be considered.

Jacob Cohen indicated that water quality is his primary issue, and expressed a desire that the human health component be incorporated into the process.

V. Further Issue Identification – Bob Smith

Bob Smith said that in addition to specific concerns, the question of the validity of perceptions arose a number of times, as well as lack of data. Four major areas for the group to consider are:

- turbidity
- discharge
- harbor navigation
- economics.

Debate followed, in which requests were made for rigorous quantification and establishment of cause and effect. After further discussion it was agreed that there is a need for the group to obtain basic operational information from the cruise ship industry

and the Navy, as well as independent studies of compliance, and perhaps a site-specific study using sediment traps in Key West Harbor and environs, rather than extrapolating from general studies.

The group considered that before the next meeting a fact-finding mission should be undertaken, with the submission of a good list of questions within a certain time-frame, to Fritz Wettstein. After submittal, the questions can be grouped into categories and groups of experts in those fields can be identified to answer those questions. Billy Causey indicated a willingness on the part of FKNMS to establish a Listserv linked to its website to facilitate communication between members, time-frame unknown. The kinds of questions to pose were widely discussed, as were format, presentation and method of research. It was agreed that all results need to be publicly available and accessible.

The next meeting is tentatively slated for January 30, 2003, at a time and location to be announced.